

NPS Form 10-900 OMB No. 1024-0018  
(Rev. 10-90)  
United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name **Coward, Edward R. and Sallie Ann, House**  
other names/site number **N/A**

### 2. Location

street & number **North side of SR 1405, 0.2 miles east of the junction of SR 1400** not for publication **N/A**  
city or town **Ormondsville** vicinity **X** state **North Carolina** code **NC** county **Greene**  
code **079** zip code **27828**

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this **X** nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property **X** meets ☐ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide **X** locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Jeffrey Crow SHPO 1/7/02  
Signature of certifying official Date  
North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

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#### 4. National Park Service Certification

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I, hereby certify that this property is:

\_\_\_\_\_ entered in the National Register \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_ determined eligible for the \_\_\_\_\_  
National Register

\_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the \_\_\_\_\_  
National Register

\_\_\_\_\_ removed from the National Register \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of Keeper

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Date of Action

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#### 5. Classification

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Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private  
☐ public-local  
☐ public-State  
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)  
☐ district  
☐ site  
☐ structure  
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	1	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	1	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

Name of related multiple property listing N/A

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6. Function or Use

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Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:       **Domestic**       Sub:   **Single Dwelling**  
              **Domestic**       **Secondary Structure**

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:       **Domestic**       Sub:   **Single Dwelling**  
              **Domestic**       **Secondary Structure**

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7. Description

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Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

**Mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century: Greek Revival**

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation       **BRICK**  
roof               **METAL**  
walls             **WOOD/weatherboard**  
other

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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8. Statement of Significance

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Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A     Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B     Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- X**    **C**    Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D     Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

**ARCHITECTURE**

Period of Significance       **ca. 1850**  
Significant Dates            **N/A**  
Significant Person           **N/A**  
Cultural Affiliation          **N/A**  
Architect/Builder            **Pittman, William**

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

\_\_\_ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

\_\_\_ previously listed in the National Register

\_\_\_ previously determined eligible by the National Register

\_\_\_ designated a National Historic Landmark

\_\_\_ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data

☒ State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

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10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property **1.66 acres**

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone Easting Northing    Zone Easting Northing

1 **18 268840 3925700** 3 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

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11. Form Prepared By

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name/title **Nancy Van Dolsen**      date **28 May 2001**

street & number **1601 Highland Drive**

city or town **Wilson** state **NC** zip code **27893**

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Additional Documentation

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Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

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Property Owner

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(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name **Barbara Dixon Tyson and Anne Dixon Vernelson**

street & number **1409 Greenville Blvd SE** city or town **Greenville** state **NC** zip code **27893**

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National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

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Coward, Edward R. and Sallie Ann, House  
Greene County, NC

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Narrative Description

Built ca. 1850, the Edward R. and Sallie Ann Coward House ranks as one of the most intact antebellum residences in Greene County. The house, attributed to carpenter William Pittman, is a two-story, three-bay, single-pile Greek Revival style dwelling that stands amidst rich farm fields. Attached to the rear of the house is a one-story, three-room kitchen ell. Facing northwest toward SR 1400, the property is flanked on the southwest by SR 1405. The family cemetery (on an adjacent parcel) for the Cowards and the Dixons sits approximately one-quarter mile southeast of the residence. A circular drive lined by mature pecan trees occupies the west yard and mature crepe myrtles flank the front entrance. A small modern one-story frame shed stands in the east yard.

A heavy timber frame building standing on brick piers with a low hip roof and a simple box cornice, the two-story, single-pile, three-bay residence features the classic proportions and finishes of the vernacular interpretation of the Greek Revival style: symmetry, a boxy form, and simple trim. The house is clad in weatherboards, and has two brick end chimneys. The single-shouldered northeast chimney, original to the dwelling, has tumbled weatherings; a storm toppled the southwest chimney causing it to be rebuilt during the 1990s. Windows and doors have molded two-part surrounds. A transom and sidelights surround the double-leaf front door. The four-over-four windows most likely date to the late nineteenth or early twentieth century.

During a recent restoration, the façade porch was rebuilt. Physical evidence—scars in the weatherboards, pockets for joists in the sill—indicated the height and width of the original porch. The porch features Doric columns, a simple cornice, and a flat roof with balustrade. The architectural details of the columns and trim were derived by studying regional Greek Revival houses that had extant one-story porches with roof decks.

The main block of the Coward House has a central stair passage flanked by two equal-sized rooms; the second floor mirrors the first-floor plan. The house retains plaster walls and ceilings, as well as five-inch pine board floors. Dominating the entry is the stair case, which features plain balusters, tapered newel posts, a rounded hand rail, and brackets highlighting the ends of the stair risers. The staircase rises to a landing the full width of the hall before turning 180 degrees to climb to the second floor. A circular plaster medallion adorns the ceiling. The two first-floor parlors flank the passage and feature identical post and lintel mantelpieces topped with heavy paneled cornices. The stocky proportions of the mantels indicate their Greek Revival date of execution, although the detailing of the cornice and lintel evoke the Federal style. The second-floor mantelpieces are simplified versions of those found on the first floor. High baseboards and two-panel Greek Revival doors are other intact original features.

Attached to the rear of the main block is an early twentieth-century kitchen ell. The one-story, light frame ell with engaged side porch also retains its weatherboarding. Pieced together with materials from other buildings, the ell has windows of differing shapes and sash configurations, and doors

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that vary, from two-panel Greek Revival style to mid-twentieth-century five-horizontal panel. The ell, which replaced a separate kitchen building, incorporates three rooms that feature random width board floors and very simple, board door and window surrounds. A small bathroom was created in the north corner of easternmost room of the ell.

A small, gable-roof outbuilding constructed during the mid-twentieth century stands northeast of the house and is a non-contributing building.

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Greene County, NC

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**Summary**

An excellent example of the Greek Revival style in Greene County, the Edward R. and Sallie Ann Coward House is eligible for listing on the National Register under Criterion C for architecture. Built ca. 1850, the single-pile, two-story, three-bay house has a symmetrical façade punctuated by a central passage. The house features two remarkable fireplace surrounds, a plaster medallion in the first floor passage, molded two-part surrounds for the windows and doors, and all original moldings, floors, and plaster walls. An original single-shouldered chimney with tumbled weatherings still stands on the northeast elevation. The high degree of architectural integrity of the house is rare among antebellum dwellings in eastern North Carolina.

**Historical Background**

The land surrounding the Coward House came into ownership of the Coward family by grant to Edward Coward in the late eighteenth century. In 1805, Edward Coward deeded a 613-acre tract to his son, Arthur Coward, for "consideration of the Natural Love and Affection which I have and do bear unto the said Arthur Coward, my son, and also for the better Maintenance and preferment of the said Arthur Coward."<sup>1</sup> Arthur Coward, who died in 1848, bequeathed the land to his son, Edward R. Coward.<sup>2</sup>

Edward R. Coward married Sallie Ann Frizzle on December 27, 1849.<sup>3</sup> Sometime during late 1849 or early 1850, Edward and Sallie Ann Coward began to build their house, a two-story, center-passage Greek Revival style dwelling, now known as the Coward-Dixon House. By the time of the 1850 census, Edward and Sallie Ann Coward were living on the property, valued at \$4,000, suggesting that the Coward House was constructed, or at least, close to completion. The possibility that the house was still unfinished is implied by the presence within their household of William Pittman, a carpenter.<sup>4</sup>

Within ten years of receiving the plantation from his father, the value of Edward Coward's real estate had climbed to \$12,000 and his personal property was valued at \$16,000.<sup>5</sup> In 1860, Edward Coward's household comprised his wife and two young daughters (Ada Augusta and Lillian Elizabeth), as well as James Harrell, an overseer, who also lived in the household. Harrell was

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<sup>1</sup> Photocopy of Greene County Deed found in the Coward-Dixon House Historic Resource Survey File, Greene County, GR 503, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Raleigh, N.C.

<sup>2</sup> Ann Vernelson, Coward and Dixon Family History, handwritten manuscript compiled December 1998. See the Coward-Dixon House Historic Resource Survey File.

<sup>3</sup> Vernelson, np.

<sup>4</sup> Federal Population Manuscript Census, Jones Township, Greene County, North Carolina, 1850. Microfilm. East Carolina State University, Greenville, N.C. Unfortunately, no additional information could be found about William Pittman.

<sup>5</sup> Federal Population Manuscript Census, Olds Township, Greene County, North Carolina, 1860. Microfilm. East Carolina State University, Greenville, N.C.



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supervising the work of Coward's twenty-seven slaves who lived in the six slave houses on the property. Coward and his overseer and slaves worked two hundred acres of the more than 600-acre property he had received from his father. Coward's livestock included one hundred swine, twelve cattle, two horses, four mules, a team of working oxen, four "milch" cows and seven sheep. Growing on the 200 improved acres were Indian corn, rice (an astonishing 600 pounds sold per year), cotton, peas, beans, hay, and sweet potatoes. The plantation also produced butter and wool.<sup>6</sup> On the eve of the Civil War, the Coward family was prospering.

Like the majority of farmers in North Carolina, the years following the Civil War were difficult for the Cowards. By 1870, the value of Coward's real estate had declined by more than half (valued at \$5,000) and his personal property had dissolved, bringing an estimate of only \$500. The household consisted of Edward, his wife, and their four children, and no live-in household or farm help.<sup>7</sup> The amount of improved land had dropped to 125 acres, and the number of livestock had diminished to one horse, one mule, two "milch" cows, two cattle, and eight swine. The farm produced only Indian corn, cotton, peas and beans, sweet potatoes, and hay. Despite the decline in wealth for the Coward family, they still retained their position as one of the wealthier farm families in the Greene County.<sup>8</sup>

Sallie Ann Coward died in 1872, leaving daughter Ada to care for Edward and three children, Edward, Jr., Sarah Francis, and Pearl.<sup>9</sup> At the age of fifteen, Edward, Jr., the only son, was working on the farm.<sup>10</sup> By 1880 the value of the property had declined again, worth only \$2500. Edward, Sr. had sold all but two hundred acres, retaining one hundred improved acres for farming. Even fewer livestock were kept, just two horses, one mule, one milch cow, and two cattle. A dozen barnyard fowl produced some eggs for the family, and a small apple orchard now stood near the house. Crops grown included Indian corn, oats, cotton, Irish potatoes, and sweet potatoes.<sup>11</sup>

Edward R. Coward died in 1881. He divided the farm between his son Edward A. Coward (1865-?) and daughter Pearl Coward Dixon (1870-1934). Pearl Coward Dixon and her husband Willis (1865-1936) received a seventy-acre parcel that included the house and outbuildings, and Edward received the remaining 130 acres of woodland and fields.<sup>12</sup> For the next fifty-five years, the Dixon family lived in the house, with Willis and Pearl occupying the north room in the main block on the second

<sup>6</sup> Federal Agricultural Manuscript Census, Olds Township, Greene County, North Carolina, 1860. Microfilm. East Carolina State University, Greenville, N.C.

<sup>7</sup> Federal Population Manuscript Census, Olds Township, Greene County, North Carolina, 1870. Microfilm. East Carolina State University, Greenville, N.C.

<sup>8</sup> Penne Smith, Historic Resource Survey Form, Coward-Dixon House, Greene County (GR 503). North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Raleigh, N.C.

<sup>9</sup> William L. Murphy, Greene County, *North Carolina Cemetery Records, Volume 1*. Typescript, 1983, 134-135.

<sup>10</sup> Federal Population Manuscript Census, Olds Township, Greene County, North Carolina, 1880. Microfilm. East Carolina State University, Greenville, N.C.

<sup>11</sup> Federal Agricultural Manuscript Census, Olds Township, Greene County, North Carolina, 1880. Microfilm. East Carolina State University, Greenville, N.C.

<sup>12</sup> Greene County Deed Book 24: 426.

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floor and their children and grandchildren occupying the second-floor south room, the first-floor south room, and a room of the first-floor ell.<sup>13</sup>

The heirs of Willis and Pearl Dixon sold the house and land in 1938 to two of Greene County's largest landowners, L.A. Moye, Sr. and Clarence L. Hardy.<sup>14</sup> For the next sixty years, the property was used as a tenant farm, and the house served as a tenant dwelling until the mid 1990s. In 1998, Barbara Dixon Tyson and Ann Dixon Vernelson, granddaughter and great-granddaughter of Willis and Pearl Dixon, purchased the house and a 1.66-acre tract.<sup>15</sup> They have restored the house for use as a place for family reunions and other events.

### Architecture Context

The Coward House, constructed ca. 1850, stands as an excellent example of the Greek Revival style in Greene County and is also one of the best preserved antebellum-era houses in the county. The house exhibits excellent integrity, retaining its original moldings, floors, walls, fireplace surrounds, stair case, most doors, and a decorative plaster ceiling medallion in the first floor passage. The house retains its original floor plan, although a kitchen ell replaced a separate kitchen building sometime during the early twentieth century.

The Greek Revival style first appeared in North Carolina domestic architecture in the construction of large plantation houses such as Creekside, Burke County (1837) and Lands End, Perquimans County (1830s).<sup>16</sup> By the 1840s and 1850s, Greek Revival was the style of choice among the well-to-do in North Carolina. The Greek Revival dwelling built by Edward and Sallie Ann Coward and their peers generally followed a form established in the eighteenth century: a bilaterally symmetrical façade with a center passage plan, one or two rooms deep. The houses were capped by a low hip or gable roof and had chimneys on end walls or between the front and rear rooms. The previously desired hall-parlor and three-or-four room plan houses were considered old-fashioned or out-of-date. According to architectural historian Catherine Bishir, the standardization of the plan "paralleled a growing standardization of stylistic elements," that was inspired by nationally popular builders' patternbooks.<sup>17</sup> The Coward House, a well-built farm house featuring a bilaterally-symmetrical facade and somewhat stylish moldings inspired by builders' patternbooks, illustrates the economic success of its owner and builder, Edward Coward.

Only three other intact Greek Revival houses dating to the late 1840s or early 1850s still stand in rural Greene County: the Speight-Bynum House (NR), the Grimsley Plantation House, and the Benjamin W. West House. All of these houses feature a symmetrical façade punctuated by a central passage. The Speight-Bynum House (ca. 1850) and the house at Grimsley Plantation (ca. 1850) are

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Edward A. Dixon by Ann Vernelson; Venelson, np.

<sup>14</sup> Greene County Deed Book 187:601.

<sup>15</sup> Greene County Deed Book 510:323.

<sup>16</sup> Catherine Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990) 195.

<sup>17</sup> Bishir, 196.

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larger and more ornate than the Coward House, exhibiting full Georgian plans, bracketed cornices, and more elaborate woodwork. The Benjamin W. West House (ca. 1845-1850), with its single-pile plan and three-bay façade highlighted by a central double-leaf door flanked by sidelights and capped by a transom, more closely resembles the Coward House. Although a one-story half-hip roof porch now adorns the façade of the Best House, it once had a one-bay porch with heavy square posts and a roof deck, similar to the Coward porch. The simple staircase with straight balusters that rises in the central passage of the Best House is also reminiscent of the Coward staircase. The Coward House, however, has more ornate fireplace surrounds.

The Coward House is one of the finest examples of the Greek Revival style in the county. In addition, one of four intact Greek Revival-style dwellings in Greene County, the Coward House is among the best preserved antebellum houses in the region.

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**Verbal Boundary Description**

The boundary corresponds with the current tax parcel, Greene County 607993, on file at the Greene County Court House, Snow Hill, North Carolina.

**Boundary Justification**

The boundary includes the house and the yard immediately surrounding the residence.

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Bibliography

Bishir, Catherine. *North Carolina Architecture*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990.

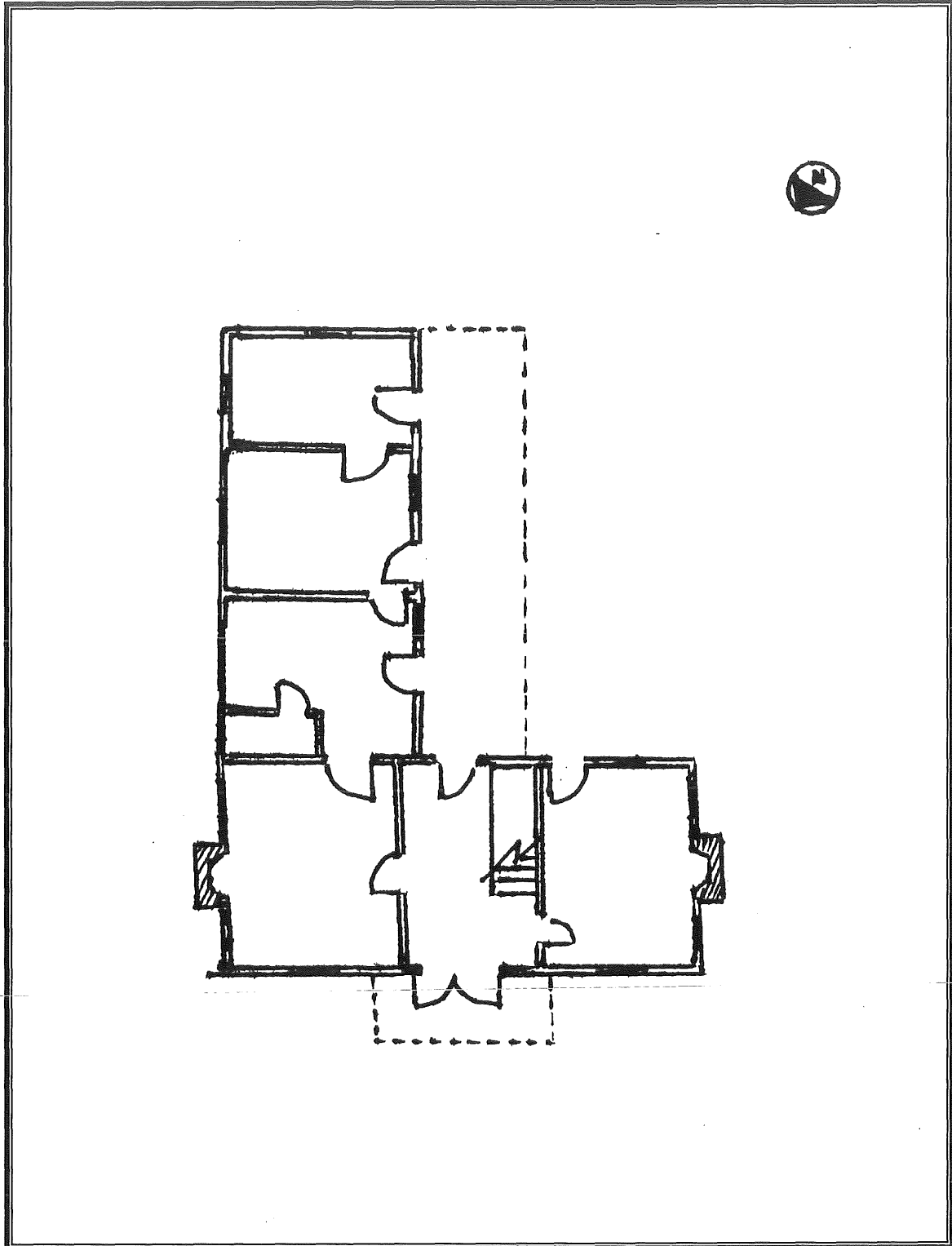
Coward-Dixon House, Historic Resource Survey File, Greene County, GR 503. Prepared by  
J. Pennebaker Smith, March 1998. North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office,  
Raleigh, N.C.

Federal Manuscript Agricultural Census, 1840, 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880, Greene County,  
North Carolina. Microfilm. East Carolina State University, Greenville, N.C.

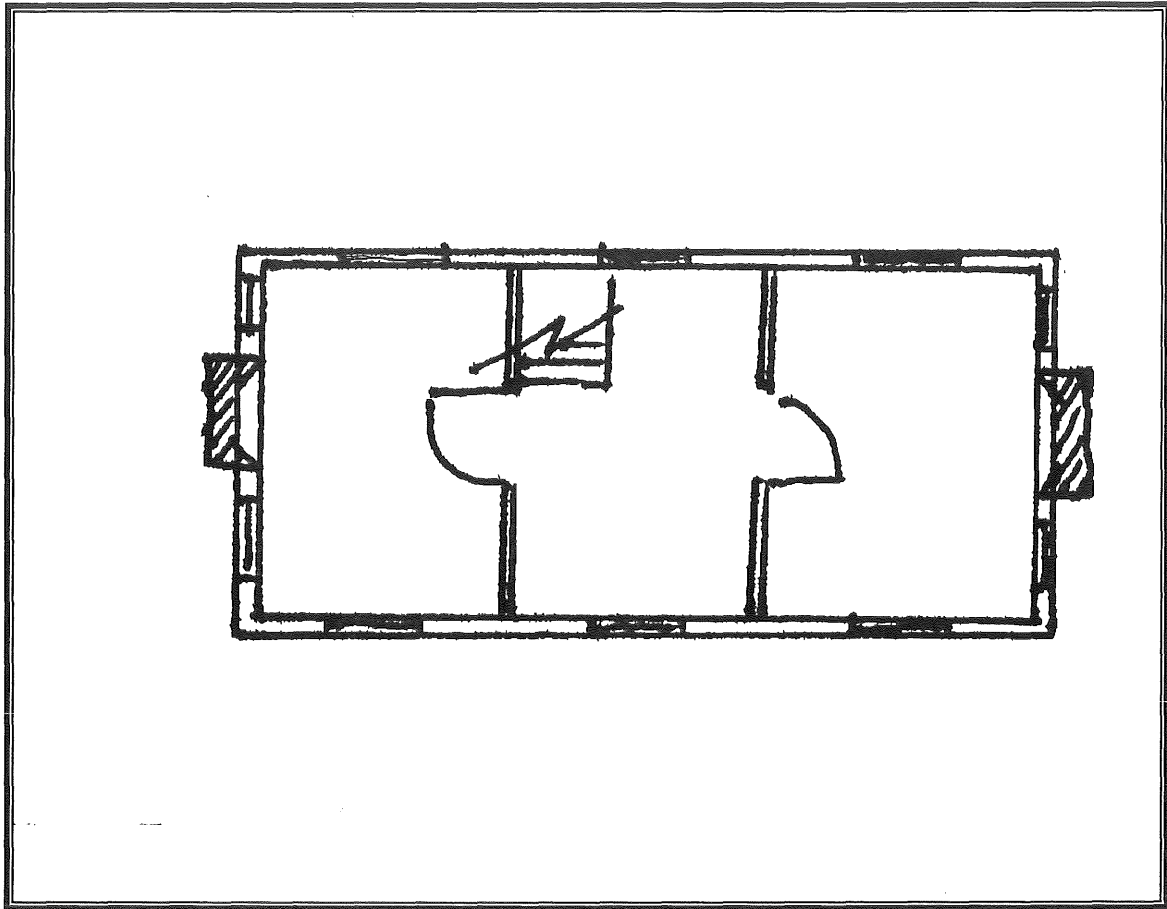
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Greene County Deed Books, Greene County Courthouse, Snow Hill, N.C.

Murphy, William L. *Greene County, North Carolina Cemetery Records, Volume 1*. Typescript, 1983.



**First Floor Plan**  
**Edward R. and Sallie Ann Coward House**  
**Greene County, North Carolina**



**Second Floor Plan**  
**Edward R. and Sallie Ann Coward House**  
**Greene County, North Carolina**

